

LAW ENFORCEMENT, AUSTERITY, AND THE TEA-PARTY

by

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September, 2011

COMMAND COLLEGE CLASS 49

The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it – creating, constraining, and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

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## **LAW ENFORCEMENT, AUSTERITY, AND THE TEA-PARTY**

By Lieutenant Frank Lucarelli

Imagine a family of four recently purchasing a townhouse in a San Francisco Bay Area city, taking advantage of the recent downturn that has made home ownership possible. This family is lucky enough to still have an income sufficient to afford their mortgage. Their home is new and is an enclave that is enclosed in decorative wrought iron fencing. On their first night, Mom and Dad look out their second story front window and see shadows moving along the lit storefronts across the street. Fleeting forms, cars pulling up, sometimes female forms leaning into open windows, other times hand-to-hand exchanges. A call to the police does little, as they don't arrive until much later, and don't seem to do much when they are there. This Police Department doesn't have a Vice Unit, or a Narcotics Suppression Unit. It doesn't participate in a Task Force to handle these "broken window" crimes that signal the malignant health of the city. In fact, Executives of this Department are desperately trying to keep their patrol division afloat; the backbone of their department, just to respond to 911 and other in- progress calls. Sadly, the reality for more police agencies than we might think is close to this scenario. The bad news is that it can get much worse.

### **The Great Recession by the numbers**

Who would have thought the failure of hedge funds heavily invested in mortgage-backed securities would cause police officers to take work furlough days? Who would have thought economic issues such as the failure of Bear Stearns and Goldman-Sachs would have meant 80 police officers losing their jobs in Oakland; for Vallejo to lose half of their sworn staff; for San Carlos, Half Moon Bay, and many other agencies to be swallowed by their respective Sheriff's

Departments? The fall-out from the banking debacle seems to continue interminably. Since the summer of 2008, the United States' economy has been mired in the largest recession since the Great Depression of 1929. (Wall Street Owes California Billions, 2010) Exacerbating this decline are groups energized by the threat to their livelihoods, and to the political process necessary to lead us back to economic health. Chief amongst these emerging political action enclaves is the TEA-Party Movement (Taxed Enough Already) with a strong streak of Libertarian ideology and an equally strong demand that taxes be lowered no matter what the result.

### **The Politics that Loom Ahead**

What happens when the TEA-Party Movement, (Taxed Enough Already), infiltrates and trickles down to motivate citizens to action. Their advocacy can have a dramatic effect at the voting booth, on a ballot measure, or a particular political candidate, as seen by the emphatic and sometimes surprising results of the 2010 election cycle. Will this call to action ultimately manifest itself by influencing the way the public sector is funded or operates?

Frederick Watson, a Pleasanton, California TEA-Party member, and City Council candidate stated during a panel discussion in Oakland on August, 2010, that if not for the state of the economy, there would not have been a TEA-Party. The unemployment rate continues to hover around 12% in California; people are hurting. They have had their mortgages foreclosed, and have lost their homes. Many in California are in homes in which the mortgage is worth more than the fair market value of the house. They've lost their jobs, and looking at the prospect of having to move their families out of the state. This condition spawns frustration and finger-pointing. ([doctorhousingbubble.com/california-homeownership-2011](http://doctorhousingbubble.com/california-homeownership-2011)).

Austerity measures that Law Enforcement has recently faced are a direct result of a sick economy; however, there is something to which every Public Sector Executive needs to take notice. In May, 2011, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker pushed for legislation to eliminate collective bargaining privileges for all of his state's public sector workers. Huge assemblies of state employees, mostly teachers, protested at the State Capital. The Tea-Party Movement countered these protestors were left-wing mobs deploying scare tactics aimed at pressuring state lawmakers to back down from the huge take away proposals of State employee compensation plans, (mediamatters.org, 2011). Congresswoman Michele Bachmann, a front-running Republican candidate for the Presidency, stated that the Madison, Wisconsin mob, were "left-wing protectionist who were demanding increased compensation plans when the State was faced with unprecedented budgetary shortfalls" (McLeod, 2011).

The intent of our assessment is not to criticize the impact of the TEA-Party in an ongoing politically polarized arena of rhetoric, or to study the ingrained ideology. We cannot, however, pretend to ignore the impact and influence of the TEA-Party, (Taxed Enough Already) and the manner in which that movement may sway political momentum for the next several years. Certainly, both the intended and unintended effects of their influence can have a dramatic impact on the funding used for essential police services throughout the Nation. The study, then, is what to do, and what futures for which to prepare.

There are several Republican presidential candidates running on some identifying principles congruent with TEA-Party characteristics. Minnesota Congresswoman Michelle Bachmann is a founder and the named Chairwoman of the House TEA-Party Caucus in July, 2010, a front-runner for the Republican Presidential nomination, (Lorber, 2010). Senator Mitt Romney, the favorite to represent the Republican Party for the Presidential election in 2012

espouses fiscal responsibility, small government and tax relief; all solid foundational TEA-Party principles, (Cillizza and Blake, 2011). Even local municipalities across the Nation have their own self-described TEA-Party movements.

**At the end it's just mathematics.**

The problem is rudimentary; when government doesn't have the money, and is not able to raise new revenue, things move into survival mode in a hurry. Basic mathematics prevails, and the equation doesn't look good. In December, 2010, the Police Executive Research Forum, (PERF) published survey results of police departments of all sizes called: *Is the Economic Downturn Fundamentally Changing How We Police?* Here are some of the results:

- 51% of departments reported that their budgets had been reduced from 2009 to 2010, with average reduction being 7%
- 59% said their budgets would be further reduced for FY 2011.
- 58% of departments have either eliminated or reduced police employee salary increases.
- 36% were reducing staffing levels through attrition.
- 22% were laying employees off.
- 38% have discontinued special units such as gang or traffic enforcement.

Half of responding agencies stated that cuts in service have already been made. What would please TEA-Party advocates had already been done – a majority of agencies have already cut out of town travel, and more alarmingly – training, or the acquisition of new technologies. A common sentiment of respondents is that policing is already running lean. Compensation packages have and are continuing to be trimmed, and funding for basic services has been largely

diminished. PERF Executive Director Chuck Wexler states in the study that Chiefs are concerned about the “big picture” in terms of the budget constraints. Will 2008 be cited as the time when things really changed for Law Enforcement?

### **Media Portrayals of Police Pay and Benefits**

A recent KGO-News, (San Francisco Bay Area), talk-show broadcast discussed the topic of how well police and firefighters are paid. The show’s host emphasized the great salaries, and concentrated on the lucrative pensions. The 3% at 50 defined pension system of which most cops and firefighters are participants was characterized as insane, and certainly not sustainable. Although the plan was adopted at a time of relative prosperity, and was intended to be an inducement for recruiting and retention, the common refrain at present is “What were these politicians thinking!” The dialog on the radio broadcast was intended to provoke a response, and that it did. Not one caller over the next hour stated that police deserved this exorbitant pay and benefits. Each caller explained their own personal economic shortcomings, (i.e., losing a job, working for less money, or longer hours). The more disturbing issue was that not one caller, nor the host, spoke of the austerity measures that police departments throughout the nation have been forced to accept.

At the Police Executive Research Forum, (PERF) July, 2011 class of the Senior Management Institute for Police, (SMIP), attendees were polled regarding what the economy meant for their respective departments. Detroit, Des Moines, Boston, and San Jose (among many others) representatives said the common denominator was cuts in services. Cuts in street felony suppression units, detective bureaus, neighborhood programs, community oriented policing programs, vice units and school resource officers. If sworn weren’t laid off, there were

at least hiring freezes or mass civilian staff lay-offs. San Diego Police Chief William Lansdowne addressed the SMIP attendees on July 28, 2011. He stated his Department is down 350 officers from when he took over the department, representing about 15% of the workforce. Others have suffered similar fates.

### **Nationwide Staff Reductions and the Subsequent Impact**

Los Angeles and Houston Police Departments implemented forced furlough days for their civilian staff. Colorado Springs Police Department is down fifty positions because of the lack of funding; meaning every retirement throws the Department further behind. Lawrence Police Department, a suburb of Boston, is down a third of its officers resulting in a soar of property and violent crimes for 2010. The Aurora, Illinois Police Department moved their special operations and community oriented police officers back into routine patrol. Sacramento, the capital of California has recently laid off 141 officers and 80 civilians. Do these Departments do more now with less? Do they learn to work smarter? Perhaps, or perhaps things don't get done; vital services are cut.

An expert panel was convened in October 2010 to study the impact of the Tea Party movement on the future of policing. The panel included TEA-Party representatives, police officials, and other professional community members to discuss libertarian ideology and its implications to public safety. The recession was on everyone's minds. The unequivocal message coming from TEA-Party panel members Fred Watson and John Guerrero was the frustration they felt with government spending. Both men expressed several that government is too big and wasteful. They stated that President Obama, or some other politician, is bent on making the United States a socialist country. The fear of socialized medicine was another



indicator that taxes were only going to increase at a time when hardworking citizens can least afford it. Law enforcement and other panel members expressed a different opinion. They expressed concern with the lack of funding for public schools, and the regionalization and privatization of Law Enforcement.

The topic of monetary support for law enforcement came up. The resounding voice was, “The TEA-Party is pro-law enforcement.” Therein lies the dichotomy. When it came to cutting wasteful government spending, the emotion was more of a utilitarian origin; spending to facilitate the greatest good for the greatest numbers. Yet when the TEA Party members realized a reduction in government spending meant public safety funding could also be reduced, there was an expression that the TEA Party was very pro-Law Enforcement. It shocked the conscience of TEA-Party members that their advocacy was having a negative effect on police staffing and services. The TEA-Party members did not connect their movement’s ideology to any subsequent harm to policing – in short it was denied.

### **Connecting the dots**

To suggest a connection of more austerity for law enforcement to the TEA-Party Movement is a process of connecting dots. The political movement is an expression of frustration with government, and that government is and has been over-funded, so some action will take place - the expression of these sentiments will influence legislation, and the will of those who serve politically.

Professor Brian Mandell, a faculty member of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, was interviewed on the subject of influence of the Tea-Party on all levels of government and its implications on Law Enforcement. Professor Mandell opined that the Tea-

Party has wielded huge political power and was instrumental in the Republican gains of the November, 2010 mid-term elections. He stated the Tea-Party ideology has “narrowed the sandlot from eight by eleven to four by six” in reference to resource allocation to Law Enforcement. Professor Mandell suggested that if law enforcement does not like these budgetary constraints, then they need to convince politicians and voters alike that police provide other forms of public worth that might not seem initially apparent.

### **What is Necessary**

If these economic forces have required that police executives and managers figure “something out,” that work has already been engaged. Further austerity will require current and future police leaders to be more creative. It will require local government, city managers, city councils, and mayors to also be more creative. Eventually, compensation will right-size; pensions and medical plans will succumb to normal economic forces.

Money, or the lack of it, will continue to affect the delivery of service for the foreseeable future. Special assignments will be cut. Large departments may eat small departments. Duplications of effort will be eliminated. Technologies that enhance the ability to crime map and even predict crime will enable executives to do a better job of putting cops on the dots. Interestingly, not all of these changes are adverse; in fact, some are necessary steps to enhance effectiveness not possible in prior years. Economic duress has provided opportunities to shed the excess weight; now we want to ensure we retain the strength necessary to do the job the public expects of their police.

The definition of policing will also evolve. What the public will expect versus what police departments will deliver will be dynamic. Executives and managers will have to find

efficacious ways of providing public value. The argument that officers put their lives on the line is true, but no longer an effective argument to leave police budgets alone. Law Enforcement leaders would do well to enhance their public value by not just concentrating on crime rates. In fact, crime has generally decreased in spite of cops losing their jobs. The message that many facets of life would be intolerable without a vital and responsive police force needs to be a message from Law Enforcement. Public safety leaders must also stay active in the political arena to ensure an objective voice on behalf of community safety is heard. If the effort in politics has a noble cause, then there is no shame in law enforcement's participation in that arena.

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